Down among the

Lara Croft has discovered in a notebook a clue to finding a hidden Egyptian tomb. Having taken the notebook to Dr Blackmore of the British Museum, she is then shocked to find he has died of a heart attack. But where is the notebook? Can Lara manage without his help? Find out in the third episode of ERICA WAGNER'S story...

PAPERS WERE SCATTERED everywhere. Had the place been rifled? Lara was suspicious, but it was hard to tell; it hadn't exactly been orderly before and who knows, Blackmore might have been looking for something in his papers that would help him with the notebook. It looked like his filing system was about as good as hers, which could lead to a great deal of mess. Slipping her gloves back on, she lifted papers and books for some sign of -

And there it was in front of her, the notebook! It was halfhidden under the yellow Post-It that was stuck to it, but she couldn't miss it. Lara was only just able to stop herself from laughing out loud. She glanced at the Post-It before peeling it off and tucking it safely in the pages: 'Haggarty?' it read. It wasn't much to go on. Still, she'd bear it in mind. Quickly she snatched it up and shoved it her pocket and once again made her exit from the museum. It was only when Lara got home that she realised what had happened to the notebook. Now she sat at her kitchen table in the weak evening light, her head in her hands. Pages had gone missing; neatly excised with a sharp blade so that what she had in front of her now was only a little more than half of what she'd had before and mostly useless, she was sure.

"I believe I have found the point at which we should dig," she read. "It is not far from where we made our great discovery; from that point one must turn to the north and then - " and there the page was cut off. Oh, rot! She pounded her fist on the table, leafed through to another mutilated page. "Then," she read, "when the tomb is at last found, I believe the secrets contained inside will be of a magnitude that will cause the world to wonder as it has never wondered before. For although I find it hard to believe, the indications are that, in the end, Ankhesenamun was able to wrest from her late vizier and later pharaoh, Ay, a power which - " and here another page was missing. She turned back a page or two "... treasure that was found in the tomb of the boy-king was beyond compare; but I believe there are greater treasures still to be found beneath the Egyptian sands..."

Yet what could Lara do? This couldn't be a dead end, she refused to accept it. Perhaps the late Dr Blackmore could still help her. In any case, it would give her something to do.

THE FILIPINO MAID set the laquered tray down on a low glass table; she bent to pour out two cups of China tea into porcelain so fine that Lara could see the level of the liquid rise against the side. A delicate scent of roses floated toward her.

"It's very good of you to see me, Miss Blackmore," Lara said. She turned toward the window. "I must say, I find your view wonderfully distracting." Outside the pane, Central Park stretched away beneath them, the leaves of its tall trees russet and gold against a brilliant autumn sky. The Reservoir glittered flat silver; she could just make out the small figures of runners pounding around its path like clockwork toys. Just below, the steps of the Metropolitan Museum were thronged with tourists and New Yorkers alike; Lara always loved to

come here. "Yes, it's splendid, isn't it," her hostess said. "I could never leave the city. I always felt sorry for my dear brother, living in dingy old London - oh, you'll forgive me, Miss Croft."

"Of course," Lara said. "In any case, I quite agree with you about London. I've never lived there myself; couldn't bear it." Cornelia Blackmore took a sip of her tea. She was a tall woman, a little older than her brother, Lara guessed, but probably not much. She was strong-boned and elegant; her hair was a dark silver and she wore black slacks and a cream cashmere rollneck sweater. Small diamonds glittered in her ears, but the diamond that glittered on the third finger of her right hand - Miss Blackmore, after all - could never be called small. All this, the Fifth Avenue apartment, the muted grandeur of its decor – the Blackmores were clearly not a family short of a bob. She remembered the doctor's fine shirt; you didn't buy that kind of thing on a curator's salary.

"I don't know how I can help you, Miss Croft," Cornelia

FAMILYHOLDAYSTO

EGYPT TO BE WON

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USING THE TIMES ROSETTA STONE (RIGHT) AS A KEY,

TRANSLATE AND RE-ARRANGE THE PIECES OF THE

The next riddle appears next Saturday.

Blackmore said, seating herself delicately on an 18th-century sofa covered in pale pink watered silk. "What is it you want to

"I'm not sure, really," Lara said. Maybe this had all been a mistake. Maybe she simply looked a fool. She sat down opposite Miss Blackmore and nibbled at a sugar-dusted biscuit. "It was just that your brother's death seemed somewhat - unexpected. He seemed such a . . . healthy man."

"Did you know my brother well, Miss Croft?" Lara saw the corner of Cornelia Blackmore's mouth turn up, ever so slightly, and felt herself blush.

"We had only just met," Lara said. "I hardly knew him at all." She hadn't said anything about the notebook. What

"I might say the same," Miss Blackmore said. "We were never close, even as children. I don't know, we never seemed to have much in common except that we both hated Nanny." She gave a little laugh. "And then he was always all over the place - I couldn't keep track! Peru, Egypt, the Sudan - I'd get postcards, you know, every so often. He was always on the verge of something great, or so he said; nothing much ever

seemed to come of it." Cornelia looked down into her teacup. "He was like Daddy, I suppose," she said finally. "Really, they were very similar – always after some adventure, always wanting more of whatever it was. My father would go biggame hunting - even after they made Africa into one huge park, you know; if you pay enough you can always find someone to take you to kill a lion. Daddy drowned after he took his yacht out alone in heavy weather; he was mad to do it, of course, but you couldn't stop him. It was the same with money: he always wanted more, nothing was ever enough, and he was always taking risks to get it, lunatic risks." She waved her long-fingered hands around at the apartment. "Still, a lot of the risks came good, so I suppose I should be grateful. More tea?" Lara shook her head. "I'm sure if Daddy hadn't died on his boat he would have popped off with a coronary, like my dear late brother. It's the kind of death one expects for such a man, don't you think?"

"Perhaps," Lara said. about his will, he didn't leave anything - except money, of course. I only tell you because you don't look like the type who'd be after that."

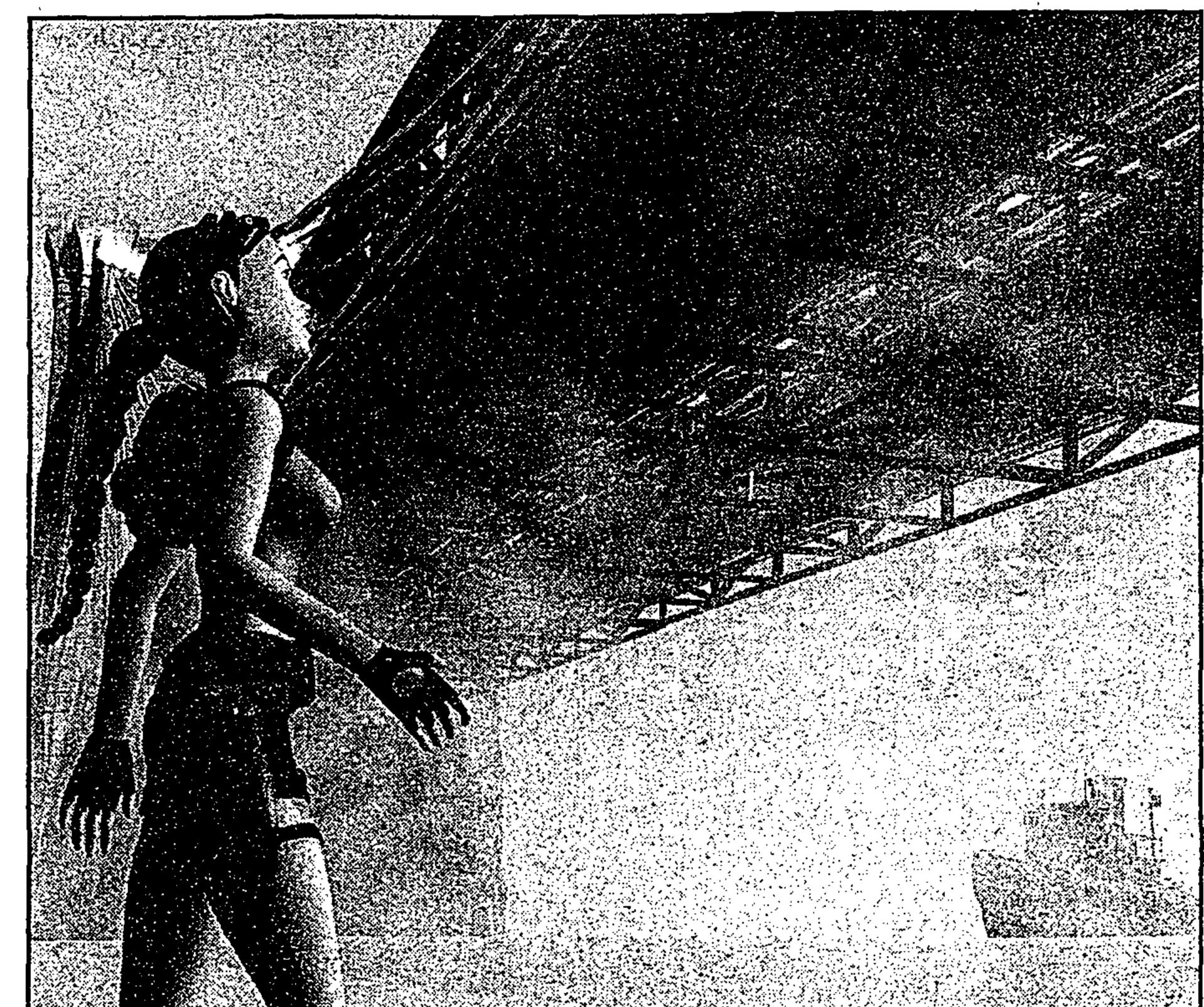
Lara blushed again. "No, I'm not," she said. "I was – I'd met him professionally, as I said in my fax. It was just we had some unfinished business."

"Well. You've come a long way for very little reward, I'm afraid. I'm sorry I couldn't be of more help." They sat in silence for a moment. "Well, Rosa will show you out." She tinkled a little bell on the table and Rosa, the Filipino maid, appeared. "Show Miss Croft to the door, Rosa, will you? I'm sorry, Miss Croft, you had a wasted journey. Goodbye." She reached out to shake Lara's hand; her grip was as firm as Lara had expected it would be.

That night, back in her room at the Royalton, Lara couldn't sleep, and it wasn't the city's din that was keeping her awake. Her head buzzed with inchoate thoughts; she was sure there was something she ought to understand but it wasn't coming clear. Finally, tired of tossing and turning, she got up out of bed and got dressed, pulling on a sturdy pair of boots and tying her hair back tightly. There was only one thing to do at a time like this. Exercise. A steam-clean for the brain.

Lara got out of the subway at Park Place; New York always amazed her - even at the three o'clock in the morning it had been fairly crowded with people who looked like they were going off to work. She walked quickly past a darkened City Hall; the Woolworth Building loomed behind her, its elongated cathedral shape piercing the sky. Crossing in front of the Municipal Building, she felt her steps lighten as she stepped onto the anchorage of the Brooklyn Bridge. This was more like it; this was the place to be.

She strode out towards the New York tower's twin arches, her heart beating faster as she rose above the river. Soon the



main cables, each nearly two feet across, rose up through a cut in the walkway; first to the height of her ankle, then to her knee, then stretching up and up towards the top of the towers where they passed through great metal saddles, keeping the bridge in tension and motion. Easily she hopped up on the cable and began her ascent. The wind stiffened, whipped her ponytail around her neck; she took a deep lungful of air. Lighter cables ran up along beside her and she held these for balance, the steel cold against her fingers.

There was only one obstacle to her climb - other than the threat of being spotted and a clutch of squad cars arriving to drag her down - and that was a gate about 15 yards along the cable, locked and bolted and fitted with extravagant spikes to prevent anyone - well, almost anyone - climbing around them. There were no stairways up through the stone towers, as there were in modern, all steel bridges; the cables were the only way up for repairmen and engineers. It was the best walk in the city, Lara thought. She had a quick scare when "I'm not sure what else I can tell you. If you're going to ask her jacket caught on the gate's spikes and she almost slipped; but the fear gave her a rush as she rebalanced on the wide cable. It soared up toward a sky where she could just see a few faint stars over Brooklyn, and she followed it, one foot in front of the other, until she was able to climb up the little ladder that led from the saddle to the very top of the tower, 276 feet – and six inches – above the East River below. On one side Manhattan glowed and burned like Oz; on the other Brooklyn smouldered in a more stately, less gaudy manner. And here, where the air was high and clear, Lara heard Cornelia Blackmore's voice in her head again: He was just like Daddy... nothing was ever enough, and he was always taking risks, lunatic risks... He was always on the verge of something great, or so he said; nothing much ever seemed to come of it. The rifled office, the missing pages; no matter what Cornelia Blackmore said, Lara didn't think a heart attack was responsible for what had happened to her brother. But what had happened to Blackmore? She was no closer to finding out. "Damn it," she thought as she scuttled down the cable to the walkway and headed back underground. It was past four when she got back up to her room and finally, she was tired. Until she saw the fax that had been slipped under her door.

Headed paper. Luxor Hilton Hotel, New Karnak, Luxor. Beneath that, handwriting she did not recognise. "Lara - care to turn over a new leaf?" it read. "If so - catch next flight. Wonderful things."

Lara packed her bags, paid her bill, and was gone before the sun rose. The next instalment will appear on December 18.

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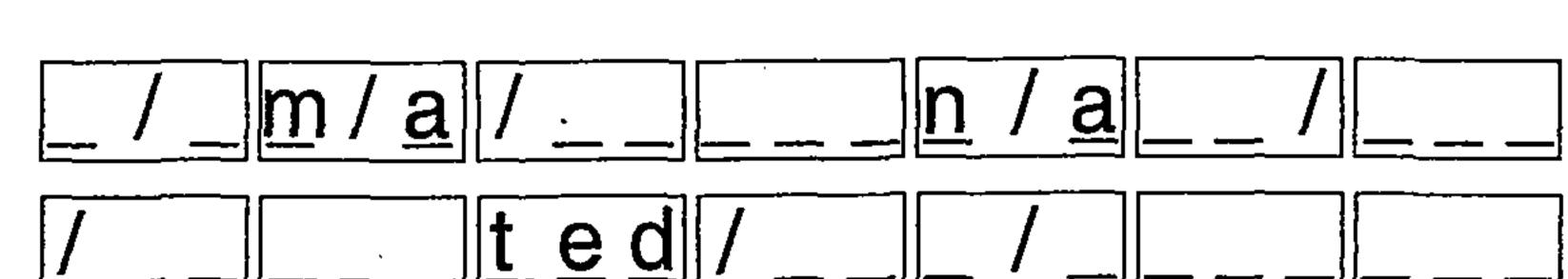
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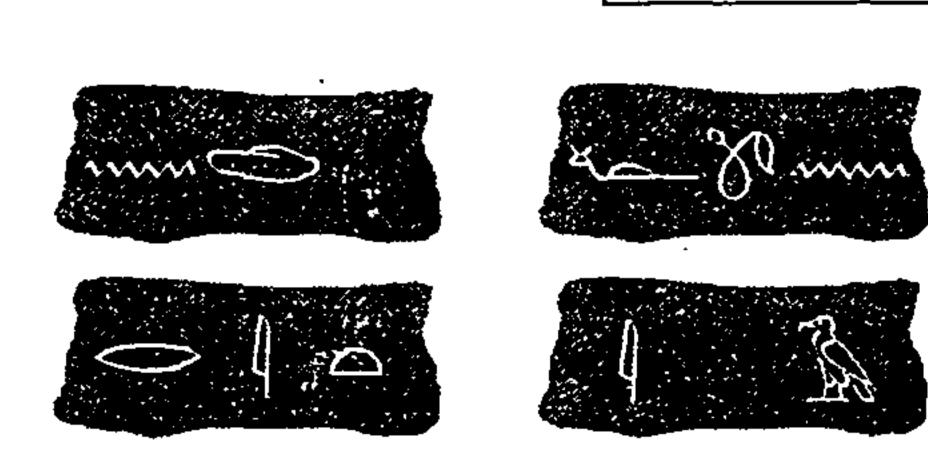




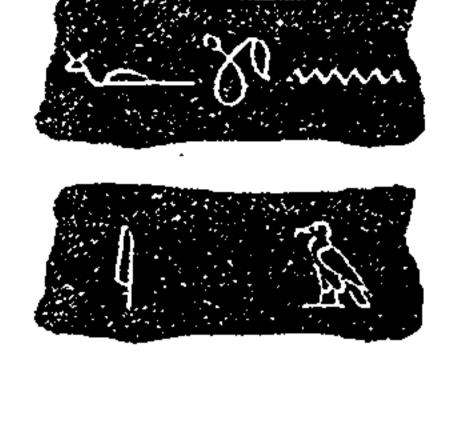


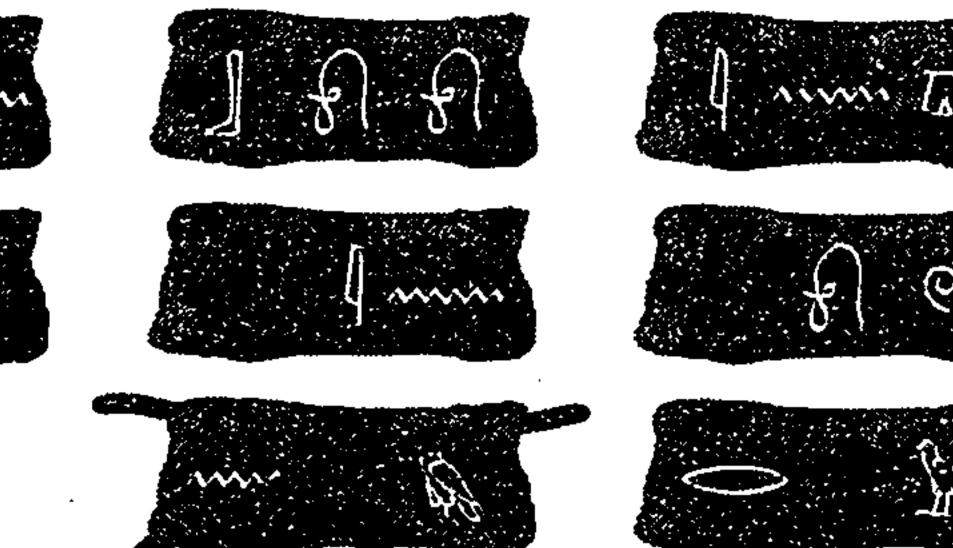






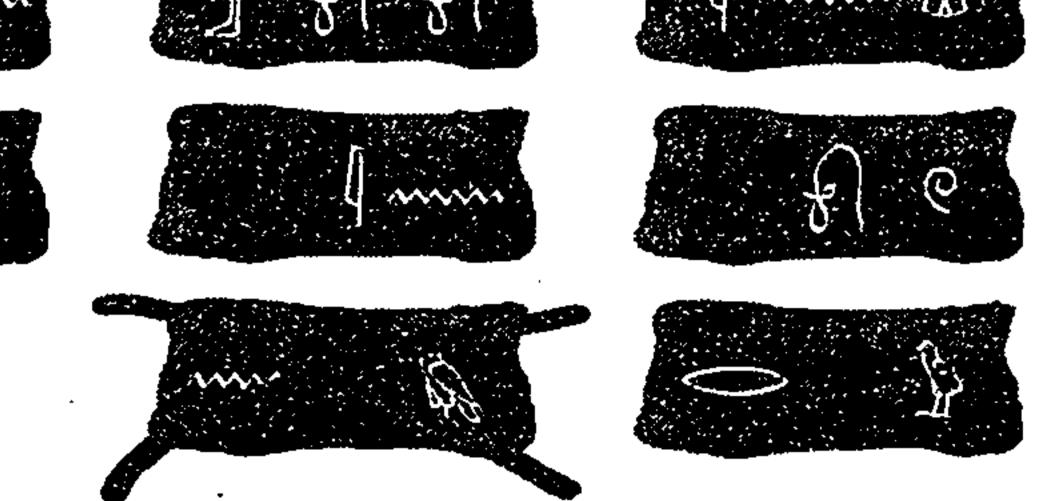


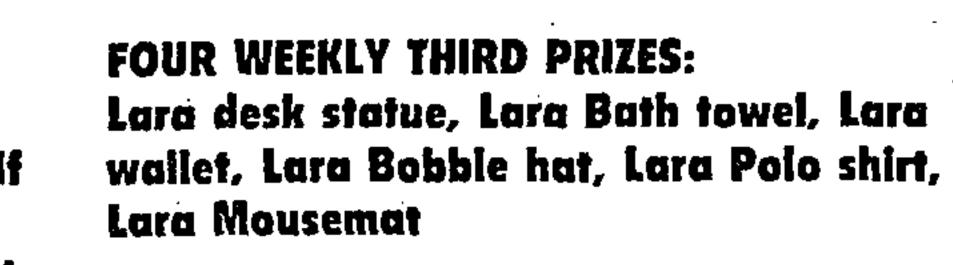






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Suite 2000

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